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SUBJECT: CODEL DURBIN IN KHARTOUM, FEBRUARY 18, 2010

¶1. (SBU) Summary: During a stop in Khartoum on February 18, Senators Dick Durbin and Sherrod Brown met with the Undersecretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Dr. Mutrif Siddiq. The CODEL's wide-ranging discussion with the key National Congress Party (NCP) insider covered elections, Darfur, the role of China and Nile water rights. In a meeting with the senators, heads of the two UN peacekeeping missions in Sudan noted "cautious optimism" in the lead-up to the April elections, but remain concerned about insecurity in Darfur and the lack of political determination in the south. End summary.

VARIOUS ISSUES DISCUSSED WITH MFA

¶2. (SBU) MFA Undersecretary Dr. Mutrif Siddiq told Senators Durbin and Brown during their visit to Khartoum on February 18 that the April national elections are a positive step for all Sudanese citizens but that it is a complicated electoral process, given that Sudan has not held elections since 1986. However, Siddiq expressed confidence in the National Election Commission (NEC) to determine the appropriate number of polling stations to accommodate all registered voters within the three-day polling period scheduled for April 11-13. Although registration varied in some areas, Siddiq called the percentage of eligible voters registered a "good average."

¶3. (SBU) Responding to a question on Darfur, Siddiq told the senators that the situation has stabilized. He cited a lack of any major humanitarian problems, except perhaps, in sanitation needs. Siddiq cautioned that high levels of humanitarian assistance in Darfur have created a "dependency syndrome" in which there is little motivation for many internally displaced persons (IDPs) to return home and become self-sufficient when everything is provided freely. He said the Government of Sudan (GOS) is looking at ways to encourage IDPs to return home and cited an upcoming conference in Cairo to discuss the rehabilitation and reconstruction of Darfur. While Siddiq acknowledged that security problems continue in some areas of Darfur, he claimed that overall security has improved. He believed that with the increased peace, now is an opportune time for more countries to invest in the reconstruction of Darfur.

14. (SBU) Siddiq called China a "serious partner" with Sudan, as well as to much of Africa, and said that most development projects in Sudan are Chinese. He told the senators that China is neutral, yet supportive, of implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA). Siddiq added that China demonstrates respect and does not attempt to impose conditions upon Sudan.

15. (SBU) Senator Durbin asked about future water rights if Southern Sudan votes in favor of secession in 2011. Siddiq stressed the need to address water rights in a consensus manner. He opined that it will be possible for North and South Sudan to reach an agreement but will be held for discussion along with other post-referendum issues. With regard to Egypt, Siddiq said they are taking 84 percent of the Nile River and Sudan would like to re-negotiate those terms.

UN CHIEFS IN SUDAN CAUTIOUSLY OPTIMISTIC

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16. (SBU) On February 18, Senators Durbin and Brown met in Khartoum with senior officials from the two UN peacekeeping missions in Sudan. Acting Special Representative for the Secretary General (A/SRSG) to the UN Mission in Sudan (UNMIS) Jasbir Liddar noted an "air of cautious optimism" pervading the country prior to the first national elections in 20 years. Liddar said he believed that the elections will proceed peacefully despite an acrimonious political atmosphere and media restrictions, because the primary disagreements surrounding the elections are political in nature, and can be resolved by Sudan's major parties through political means. Liddar remains concerned, however, that an independent Southern Sudan would not be viable should voters in the south choose independence in the planned 2011 referendum. "The governing structures in the south are not stable, and the government offers no services, and no governing procedures," he noted. Criticizing the Government of Southern Sudan, A/SRSG Liddar said that the south's main political players so obsessed with internal "micro" issues, that they ignore the external "macro" issues such as corruption, development and political sophistication.

17. (SBU) Newly-arrived Joint Special Representative (JSR) of the UN-African Union Mission in Darfur (UNAMID) Ibrahim Gambari acknowledged that his mission faces an uphill struggle in the war-torn western region of Sudan, but announced confidently that he had arrived in Sudan to fulfill his instructions to "make it work." Gambari outlined his four priorities for his tenure in El Fasher for the senators. First, he expects UNAMID to become more proactive in issues surrounding the Darfur peace process, post-conflict recovery, and internal economic development. Second, he will insist that UNAMID peacekeepers interpret their mandate more robustly, adding, "We need to defend ourselves," particularly in the wake of an attack on February 16 against a UNAMID police patrol in South Darfur. Third, Gambari intends to look separately at the issue of Darfur's internally displaced persons (IDP) camps, to identify ways for IDPs to transition to constructing viable communities. Fourth, Gambari sees UNAMID's role in improving Chad-Sudan relations as key to bringing about an end to the long conflict, and said UNAMID will also work to minimize the unintended consequences of the fighting. Gambari was somewhat more pessimistic than his UNMIS counterpart on the issue of elections in Darfur, warning that Sudan's two main parties would use their political monopolies to crowd out opposition voices, especially in Darfur, where the NCP has a political hegemony over all other parties.

18. (SBU) Senators Durbin and Brown did not clear this cable prior to their departure.
WHITEHEAD